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Implementation of Career Transition Program for Students with Learning Disabilities in Sabah

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Abstract

Career Transition Program (CTP) for students with special education needs (SSEN) was implemented into Secondary Special Education Standard Curriculum in 2019. Although students are trained with various skills throughout this program, it was found that SSEN working ability is low, employers have lack knowledge of SSEN and parents are lack of information regarding the skills program conducted in school. Thus, this study aims to identify the level of implementation of CTP for SLD from the aspect of student-focused planning and the aspect of student development. A quantitative survey was conducted to collect data in Ranau, Tambunan, Keningau and Tenom. A simple random sampling technique is used to obtain the samples in the study. Questionnaires were distributed in *Google Form* through *Whatsapp* and *Telegram* while findings were analyzed descriptively with SPSS. This study found that the implementation of CTP from the aspect of student-focused planning and the aspect of student development was at moderate level. These findings enable school administrators to detect aspects of which to be improved in the implementation of this program. Collaboration between schools, parents and employers is needed to ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of CTP.

Keywords: Career Transition Program, Students With Learning Disabilities, Special Education, Student-Focused Planning, Student Development.

Introduction

Learning Disability is a type of neurological disorder related to the way the brain receives, processes, analyzes and stores information. This neurological disorder causes an individual having difficulties in the acquisition of writing, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical skills (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Ebert et al., 2003; Sattler, 1998). Therefore, students with learning disabilities (SLD) are students who have difficulty in reading, writing, calculating and reasoning. This difficulty causes the students having lower academic achievement compared to typical students. Besides, SLD have problems with their short-term, long-term, and working memory (Aktan, 2020).

Based on this awareness, special education was developed to help students with special education needs (SSEN). Through this education, it is aimed to enable gifted students to make the most of their abilities, prevent the disability of individuals from becoming an obstacle and

enable these individuals to meet their own needs by equipping them with the skills that will help them to be independent and productive individuals (Ataman, 2011). In special education, besides learning core subjects, SSEN are trained with basic skills, life skills and vocational skills. Mastery of these skills is essential as it will avoid them from being unemployed and thus having a low quality adult life. However, theoretical learning and limited practical in the school area could not guarantee the marketability of SSEN. Gaining working experience throughout industrial training with the involvement of agency and parents support are required.

Therefore, CTP was implemented into Secondary Special Education Standard Curriculum in 2019. According to Alias (2015), CTP is a program designed specifically for SSEN in an effort to master the necessary skills in order to gain real working experience. In addition, preparation for social barriers and interaction with colleagues or employers is also emphasized in this program (Alias, 2015). This program is important to ensure SSEN is ready to work after post school (Shaffeei et al., 2020). In Malaysia, implementation of CTP starts from year one for Secondary Special Education Schools and secondary schools with Integrated Special Education Program and Inclusive Education Program. While the implementation in Secondary Special Education Vocational School starts from year four.

Although SSEN is exposed and trained with various skills throughout CTP, it was found that SSEN working ability is low (Ratnam et al., 2018; Zainal et al., 2020) while having attitude and communication problem, hard to understanding instruction and difficult in adapting to working environment (Zainal et al., 2019). Besides that, employers have less knowledge regarding SSEN (Azlan & Alias, 2016), unconfident of their working abilities and reluctant to accept them as a trainee (Abdullah et al., 2015). Apart from that, parents and the local community have less information on the skills program carried out in schools (Abdullah et al., 2015). This phenomenon derives to the questions is CTP implemented in school? If it is, to what extent is the implementation of this program?

According to Taxonomy Transition Programming 2.0, a comprehensive transition program contains of five primary practice aspect, namely student- focused planning, student development, program structure, interagency collaboration and family engagement. It is found that there are studies in the aspect of student- focused planning, program structure, interagency collaboration and family engagement in the implementation of Career Transition Program. However, less study focus in the aspect of student development. Moreover, previous studies mainly took place in the urban area of Peninsular Malaysia. Consequently there is lack data collection on the implementation of this program in the rural area of eastern Malaysia. Hence, this study is conducted to identify the level of implementation of CTP for SLD in Sabah. Specifically, this study has two objectives:

- i. To identify the level of implementation of CTP for SLD in Sabah from the aspect of student-focused planning.
- ii. To identify the level of implementation of CTP for SLD in Sabah from the aspect of student development.

Literature Review

Early work that explores transition is attributed to the field of anthropology and the idea that human lives are marked by 'rites of passage' or changes in status, roles or relationship (Kralik

et al., 2006). Within the field of education, transition has traditionally been framed as a person's movement between institutions or settings, such as from nursery to primary school or from secondary to tertiary education (Hviid & Zittoun, 2008). Based on this concept, Kohler (2016) defined CTP as a service provided to move SSEN from pre-school to post-school life. As mentioned by Diyenno et al (2019), career transition is a significant process in life which brings great changes to a person's life.

In order to have an effective planning, organizing, and evaluating transition program, Kohler developed taxonomy for transition programming in 1996. This taxonomy moves transition planning teams from a theoretical or conceptual processing approach to one offering substance and activities and actions (Brezenski, 2018). In other words, contextual learning and collaborative learning are emphasized throughout this program by involving students in action activities such as industrial training. Over the course of 20 years, Kohler and her partners (Gothberg, Fowler, and Coyle) has made significant improvements within certain aspects of this taxonomy by adding concrete practices which were identified from effective programs and research literature. For example, school climate is added into program structure while cultural relevancy, empowerment, and family preparation are emphasized within family engagement. Thus a holistic taxonomy transition programming 2.0 with comprehensive concrete practices is developed in 2016 in comparison to the one in 1996.

In the process of preparing IEP for CTP, Malata & Muzata (2022) noted that IEP goals, which are linked to and support the post-secondary outcomes, should be based on personalized strengths and interests of the student. In addition, Polloway et al (2013) mentioned that family background and family culture should be considered while preparing IEP for CTP. Besides that, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that one or more transition goal to be included in IEP. Specific transition components such as transition service requirements and agencies involved (Brolin & Loyd, 2004) are also needed in IEP. Meantime IEP content can be changed from time to time according to student development (Alias, 2015) while teacher act as facilitator throughout the transition program (Zainal & Hashim, 2019).

In the process of preparing IEP for CTP, it is found that SSEN cannot understand themselves (Abdullah & Ibrahim, 2021) and lack confidence in their knowledge of the world of work (Mehta-Diston, 2018). In the study of Nor & Yassin (2018), it is found that 96.6% parents agree that parents should be open to express their opinions for the benefit of their children. However, only 40% parents attended IEP meeting and parent engagement in decision-making is at moderate level (Nor & Yassin, 2018). Meanwhile Abdullah and Ibrahim (2021) study reported that parents are not involved as decision-makers in determining the direction of education for their children due to most schools practiced one-way communication and teachers provide fewer opportunities for parents to talk or give ideas.

From the perspective of employer involvement in CTP, Tordin & Tahar (2021) study shown that the collaboration between agencies in CTP is at high level. Shaffeei et al (2020) study also proved that local industries supported the implementation of CTP. In addition, Saimi (2019) study noted that representatives from various agencies successfully in assisting SSEN in training and providing job opportunities. In contrast, Abdullah et al (2015) study shown that only one out of six agencies was involved in CTP.

In the aspect of student development, Kohler (2016) stated that academic skills, life skills, social skills, emotional skills and working skills are essential skills to be learned in school. A guideline by the Ministry of Education (MOE) on the other hand noted that life skills, career skills, self advocacy, adult life culture, career preparation and workplace support and development are essential skills in CTP. Shaffeei et al (2020) suggested that self management skills, individual skills, basic computer and technology skills and workplace skills are needed. In short, it is crucial to equip SSEN with various skills for employment.

According to Leconte (2006), training need to be carried out to help students mastering the skills needed in life. Chances to get a post-school job is higher for students with workplace experiences (Blau et al., 2015). Addition from Alias (2015), working experience is crucial in training students to be more independent. The internship at the actual workplace has provided the platform for the SSEN not only to experience real working life but also to build their capabilities to meet the requirements and demands of the employers (Zainal et al., 2021). Zainal & Hashim (2019) study reported that vocational skills training in school are carried out accordingly with the syllabus. Apart from that, excellent students were sent to vocational training centres outside the school for further training for the usage of heavy machinery and equipment of which only available in training centres.

Besides training, career awareness and career assessment tend to help SSEN to identify their future career interests through various fields of employment (Blackmon & Falls, 2007). Fujino & Sato (2022) study in Japan reported that school field trip and workplace trip begins to carry out in the first year of the secondary school. This is because early planning will result in a good sharing of information as well as increasing the chances for future collaborations that will lead to the same objectives (Fujino & Sato, 2022). This is in line with IDEA which firmly stated that transition program should begin as early at the age of 14 years old or 16 years old.

Methodology

This study is using a quantitative survey research design to identify the level of implementation of CTP for SLD in Sabah. Questionnaires were used to collect data from secondary special education teachers in Ranau, Tambunan, Keningau and Tenom. 63 teachers were selected through simple random technique from the population of 75 teachers with reference to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling size table. Questionnaire in this study was adapted from Tordin & Tahar (2021) study together with references from concrete practices in Taxonomy Transition Programming 2.0. Four special education teachers with more than ten years teaching experience were selected to undergo the questionnaire content validity. Pilot test was done onto 30 samples in Kota Kinabalu. Reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) was calculated and it was found to be 0.89. Questionnaires were then distributed in Google Form to the sample through Whatsapp and Telegram applications.

Basically this questionnaire consists of three parts: Part A, Part B and Part C, with a total of 26 items. Part A is demographic of respondent. Part B measures the level of implementation of CTP from the aspect of student-focused planning. While Part C measures the level of implementation of CTP from the aspect of student development. A four-point Likert scale (1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes and 4-always) was used to collect data from respondents. Findings were analyses descriptive with Statistical Package for Social Science

(SPSS) to obtain the mean and standard deviation for the items in Part B and Part C. Interpretation mean score for each items is determined according to the source of Jamil (2002) whereas mean 1.00 to 2.33 =low level, mean 2.34 to 3.66=moderate level and mean 3.67 to 5.00 =high level.

Findings

Table 1.1

Demographic of Respondent

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	20	32
Male	43	68
Female		
Age	11	18
20-29	25	40
30-39	18	29
40-49	9	14
50 and above		
Working experience		
1-8 years	17	27
9-16 years	19	30
17 years and above	27	43
Highest education level		
Diploma	9	14
Degree	45	71
Master	9	14
Option		
Special education	59	94
Other option	4	6
TOTAL	63	

According to table 1.1, there are total 63 respondents in this study. The ratio for female teacher and male teacher is 2:1. Most of the teachers are in the age of 30 to 39 years old (40%) while only 14% teachers in the age of 50 and above. 17 teachers have a working experience within 1 to 8 years, following by 19 teachers with 8 to 16 years experience and 27 teachers have a teaching experience of 17 years and above. Majority teachers are graduated with a degree holder (71%) while master holder and diploma holder are in the same rate of 14% each. Among 63 teachers, 59 of them have a major in special education.

Table 1.2

Implementation of CTP for SLD from the aspect of student-focused planning

Construct	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation of mean score
Individual Education Planning (IEP) development	3.78	0.415	High
Student participation	2.49	1.005	Moderate
Family engagement	3.23	0.764	Moderate
Employer involvement	2.70	0.813	Moderate
	3.05	0.750	Moderate

Table 1.2 shows the findings of the implementation of CTP for SLD in the aspect of student-focused planning. Four constructs are studied under this aspect, which are Individual Education Planning (IEP) development, student participation, family engagement and employer involvement. Items which are included in IEP development construct are whether postsecondary education or career goals are specified in IEP and set based on student interests and abilities. Result shows that the implementation of IEP development is at high level with mean=3.78 (sd=0.415). In student participation construct, student ability in expressing their interests and preferences as well as their ability in evaluating their participation in the planning process were measured. Mean result shows that student participation is 2.49 (sd=1.005) of which is at moderate level. In terms of family engagement and employer involvement, same items that are covered in these two constructs are whether meeting time and place support family engagement and employer involvement. Besides that, items like parental role in decision making and employer acceptance of SSEN as trainee also been measured. It was found that both family engagement and employer involvement were in moderate level with mean=3.23 and 2.70 for each construct. In overall, implementation of the CTP for SLD in Sabah from the aspect of student-focused planning is at moderate level (mean=3.05, sd=0.750).

Table 1.3

Implementation of CTP for SLD from the aspect of student development

Construct	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation of mean score
Types of skills	3.94	0.246	High
Practical training	2.78	0.923	Moderate
Assessment	3.77	0.508	High
	3.50	0.559	Moderate

Table 1.3 shows the findings of the implementation of CTP for SLD from the aspect of student development. Among the constructs that are identified under the aspect of student development are types of skills, practical training and assessment. In the construct of types of skills, measuring items are on of skills learned in school like life skills, social skills and employment skills. Result shows that mean of this construct is 3.94 of which is at high level.

After measuring types of skills student learned, items go deeper to see whether student is involved in practical session in school and industrial training. It was found that practical training construct was at moderate level with mean=2.78 (sd=0.923). In the assessment construct, items to be identified is whether student assessment is conducted based on the Standard Document Curriculum and Assessment and student achievement is followed up with focused interventions. Result shows that student assessment has a high mean of 3.77 (sd=0.508). In overall, the level of implementation of CTP for SLD in Sabah from the aspect of student development is at moderate level (mean=3.50, sd=0.559).

Discussion

This study aims to identify the implementation of CTP for SLD in Sabah. In the aspect of student-focused planning, it was found that teachers are able to prepare IEP based on the transition program requirements in IDEA. Although transition program was newly introduced in 2019, inclusion of specific measureable postsecondary objectives in IEP is not an obstacle for teachers. This is because majority teachers in this study are major in special education and with more than an eight years teaching experience. With the experience and specialization in this field, it allows teachers to set the postsecondary objectives according to SSEN individual interests, abilities and needs.

In terms of student participation in transition planning, it was found that students were inactive when asked to voice out their interest and give opinion regarding their future planning. Looking back the life of SLD from a child to an adolescent, most of the time parents or guardians are making decision on behalf of them. Due to their neurological disorder, they are rarely given a chance to make a choice for themselves. Consequently, self-determination skill is not well trained in daily life. Besides that, the failure of student to receive the type of education that suits the characteristics of the student from the early stages of schooling (Abdul Hanit, 2010) as well as lack knowledge and information gains in the career field also makes it difficult for SSEN to detect their interests and abilities in depth.

In an effort to help SSEN determining their future careers, parents are invited to attend the transition planning meeting. However, family engagement in the transition planning is at moderate level. This finding is in line with Nor and Yasin (2018) study whereby only 40% parents attended IEP planning. Although study of Abdullah and Ibrahim (2021) proved that family engagement in rural areas is higher comparing to urban areas, however, this study finds the otherwise. Based on Zainal & Hashim (2019) analyse, it was found that parents are too busy with their work, thus they have no time to take part in school activities. As a solution towards parents' time constraint, schools held the transition planning meetings during weekends and yet parent attendance is still discourage. Therefore, awareness of the need to encourage both the guardians and the students to think about their future career paths from an early stage is crucial (Fujino & Sato, 2022).

Based on Epstein model, one of the important parental roles is to help SSEN to make decisions whenever there is a need. However this study shown that parents role in decision making is at moderate level. Similarity found in Nor and Yasin (2018) study which shown that only 46.6% of the parents are involved in setting up objectives for their children in transition program. Due to the fact that parents are the closest person (Nor and Yasin 2018) who know the strength and weaknesses of their child (Taib & Jelas, 2009), parents should know that their

engagement in the process of choosing future careers for their children is a kind of commitment which will shape their children future.

Besides parents, employers are invited to join the career transition meeting together with students, parents and teachers. It is found that employer involvement in terms of job offerings and career discussions was at low level. The same findings were reported in Abdullah et al (2015) study of which only one out of six agencies took part in the CTP. Oppositely, Tordin & Tahar (2021) study shown that collaboration between agencies in CTP is at high level and Shaffeei et al (2020) study reported that CTP was supported by local industries. In addition, Saimi (2019) study also noted that representatives from various agencies successfully in assisting SSEN in training and providing job opportunities.

In a study by Valentini et al (2019) with 13 employers in the implementation of CTP for students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (IDD), respondents features a few factors towards employers readiness in involving in CTP. Firstly, exposure and solicitations between employer and SSEN through community works such as church activities making employer gets use to the attendance of the disabled in society. Therefore, employer is not feeling awkward to accept SSEN as industrial trainee in their agencies. Besides that, teacher initiative moves employers to involve in CTP. Employer is touched by teacher efforts in convincing employer on the viability of SSEN. Apart from that, employer awareness towards their society responsibility calls them to provide work opportunity to SSEN and treat them as equal as the others.

In the implementation of CTP in the aspect of student development, it is found that teacher equipped SSEN with various skills needed for employment. SSEN is learning life skills, career skills, self advocacy, adult life culture, career preparation and workplace support and development in school. Mastery of all these skills is essential to ensure SSEN having a quality post-school life. For example, students with strong and clear communication skills can indirectly develop a good working relationship with other students or future co-workers (Lindsay et al., 2019). Besides that, students who can manage themselves can avoid from feeling discomfort in a new working environment and thrive to achieve excellence in work (Zainal et al., 2020).

According to Leconte (2006), training need to be carried out to help students mastering the skills needed in life. Addition from Alias (2015), working experience is crucial in training SSEN to be more independent. Moreover chances to get a post-school job is higher for SSEN with workplace experiences (Blau et al., 2015). Even so, this study found that practical training run in schools was at moderate level. This is because teachers facing difficulties in finding employers who are willing to accept SSEN as industrial trainees (Alias, 2015). Besides that, transportation to the workplace is a challenge for SSEN especially when both parents are in work. In addition, Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns caused the shutdown of industries and thus SSEN industrial training was affected.

Besides skills learning and industrial training, career awareness and career assessment tend to help SSEN to identify their future career interests through various fields of employment (Blackmon & Falls, 2007). This study found that both career awareness and career assessment run in schools are at moderate level. Through the findings of Fujino & Sato

(2022) in Japan, it is reported that school field trip and workplace trip begins to carry out in the first year of the secondary school. This is due to early planning will result in a good sharing of information as well as increasing the chances for future collaborations that will lead to the same objectives (Fujino & Sato, 2022). Hence, career carnivals and industrial field trips should be incorporated into school annual planning and carried out throughout the year for the benefit of SSEN. In term of career assessment, it was found that it is well done by teachers whereas career assessment is conducted based on the Standard Document Curriculum and Assessment and SSEN with poor achievement is followed up with focused interventions.

Conclusion

SSEN post-school outcomes is highlighted during recent years when it is found that SSEN having a lower employment rate. In order to enable SSEN to live independently and be able to compete in society, CTP have been implemented into secondary special education curriculum. In the implementation of this program, this study shows that student-focused planning still need to improve in term of student career determination, parents engagement and employer involvement. Whereas student development shows that there is a need for SSEN to involve in industrial training for skills empowering purpose and gaining working experience. Therefore, it is proposed that government could promote CTP to the public via advertisements to attract agencies and local communities to collaborate with schools in the implementation of CTP. Apart from that, career workshops can be held to increase parents' awareness towards their roles and the importance of children future careers. Through this study, schools are able to identify factors of which affecting the outcomes of CTP in the aspect of student-focused planning and the aspect of student development. In addition, the findings of this study could be used as a guideline for MOE in planning skill courses framework for SSEN in the future. It is suggested that further study can be run in other aspects in Taxonomy Transition Programming 2.0 such as program structure. Besides that, family and employer readiness in the implementation of CTP could also be studied. In order to make CTP a successful program, collaboration between schools and communities such as family and employer are needed. A better future life of SSEN comes from the awareness and effort of collaboration from each level of the society.

This study is bringing awareness to policy maker that there is a need to impose regulation for employer to have social contributions annually towards education field especially in special education. Employer could run a seminar or workshop in school, invite school for a factory visit or involve in SSEN internship program like CTP. Participation and contribution of employer in school enable SSEN to get in touch with variety of career choices and thus helping them to determine their career interest. Through this study, it is adding information to the previous studies which are mainly concentrated in city area that student participation and employer involvement in CTP in rural area is in moderate level. Thus involvement and encouragement for SSEN in future career field is needed throughout strategic yearly plan between schools and employer.

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